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Memories

(Episode 22)

Until now our respected father (may Allah's mercy be upon him) had been staying at our house at Lasbela House. Our two elder brothers, respected Muhammad Razi Sahab (may Allah's mercy be upon him) and respected Muhammad Wali Raazi Sahab (may his shade be extended) were also staying in the same house. We two were staying at Darul Uloom in Sharafi and only got to go home during holidays. In view of our respected father's (may Allah's mercy be upon him) administrative responsibilities at Darul Uloom, he should have been staying at Darul Uloom. However, he was engaged in various activities in the city which did not allow this. At long last, at our insistence, he decided to move to Darul Uloom. Two additional rooms with tiled roofs were built adjacent to the two rooms built by the late Haji Kabeer Ud Deen Sahab in which we were staying. Finally on 4th April 1963 (equivalent to 9th *Dhi Qa'dah* 1382H), our parents left their house at Lasbela House and moved to Darul Uloom.¹ Our joy knew no bounds at this, because after having lived away from our parents for six years we were now getting the opportunity to stay in their cool shade permanently. Also, we could now benefit from our respected father (may Allah's mercy be upon him) at all times.

Hajj season was near, so soon after moving to Darul Uloom our respected father (may Allah's mercy be upon him), together with our respected mother and elder brother Muhammad Razi Sahab (may Allah's mercy be upon them both), left for Hajj. And the loneliness returned! However, together with rendering teaching services at Darul Uloom and working on Fatwas and publications, I was also preparing for Intermediate exams, so I became busy.

Sea Journey for Umrah, 1963H

The heart of every Muslim remains ever-desiring to visit the *Haramayn Shareefayn*. However, especially after reading the events of the Noble Messenger's (peace be upon him) life and conduct in the year of *Dawra-e-Hadith*, this desire had kindled into a blazing fire. With the grace and favour of Allah Ta'ala I had been blessed with performing Hajj in the company of our respected father (may Allah's mercy be upon him) during my childhood. But I was only eight years old then, so I could not recall anything more than a few foggy remnants of semi-faded memories (which I have mentioned before). Besides, I was too young to appreciate the spiritual and historical significance of the sacred places. As a result, feelings of envy and longing would stir up in my heart every year when people would go for Hajj. And I would conjure up visions of them enjoying spiritual blessings from the sacred places, and would pray that Allah Ta'ala bestow this treasure to me as well. It was during those days (Muharram 1382H, circa June 1962)

¹ This date is recorded in my diary of 1961.

that my elder sister (respected 'Ateeqa Khatoon Sahiba (may her shade be extended)), whom we call Apa Bi, returned from Hajj. I composed the following poem for her:

مبارک تم کو آیا بی! بڑی دولت ملی تم کو
جو ہر نعمت سے بڑھ کر ہے، وہی نعمت ملی تم کو
مبارک ہو دیار مصطفیٰ کو دیکھ کر آنا
خدا کی رحمتوں سے دامن امید بھر لانا
تمہارے یہ قدم بیتِ خدا کے گرد گھومے ہیں
انہوں نے وادئی بطحا کے سنگریزے بھی چومے ہیں
مجھے تو رشک آتا ہے تمہاری ان نگاہوں پر
جو سجدہ کر کے آئی ہیں نبی کی سجدہ گاہوں پر
الہی اپنے اسی پر تُو یہ احسان فرما دے
کہ اُس کو اک دفعہ پھر وادئی بطحا میں پہنچا دے

Congratulations Api Bi! A great treasure have you earned,
Which is above every other blessing, that blessing have you earned,
Congratulations on visiting the city of Mustafa,
On returning with your lap filled with mercies from God,
These feet of yours have circumambulated the House of God,
They have also kissed the stones of the valley of *Bathaa*,
I envy these eyes of yours,
Which have prostrated on places where the Messenger prostrated
Oh Allah! Grant the blessing to this one who is grief-stricken,
Return him to the valley of *Bathaa* a time once more

I wished, and also had hope from the mercy of Allah (the Glorious and Most High), that He would certainly grant this huge favour to this unworthy slave of His. But outwardly, there were no visible signs or means of this happening any time soon. Our respected father, along with my respected mother and

brother Muhammad Razi Sahab (may Allah's mercy be upon them all) departed for Hajj in 1963. Regarding this, I found the following note in my diary¹ of 14 May 1963, equivalent to 3 Muharram 1383:

"The night rings 2am, and in this tranquil silence I am picturing the blissful events which today brought in its lap. Today morning, first my second paper (of Intermediate) completed very satisfactorily. The time from evening to 10pm passed excruciatingly slowly, because today my parents were returning from the city of the beloved (peace be upon him). Their plane landed at 11pm, and my parents had reached home by 1am. Listening to the enchanting tales from the city of the beloved, the imagination remained lost in those enticing scenes for hours, from where the vitalizing rays of peace and tranquility rose upon mankind."

The following is noted in the next day's entry:

"Today I remained lost in fantasy the whole day, wandering around in those charming valleys of peace and tranquility from where, fourteen hundred years ago, the saviour of mankind raised the beacon of enlightenment. I saw myself today in the vivifying cradle of the land of Hijaz. The eyes of my imagination were kissing those gardens of date-palm trees under whose dense and cool shade a weeping mankind drank the Water of Life of justice and equity. At times I would gaze upon those swords under whose shade that light was born which later illuminated the East and the West. And at times I would look towards those soul-nourishing gatherings whose "wick" established the imprints of the greatest way of life upon this universe. I would be transfixed into a reverie of rapture, but upon return to the world of existence the melody of imagination would mutate into those night-time cries and laments which the cruel tempests of the world have stirred up in the heart of every Muslim whose heart has not been numbed:

”اے خاصہ خاصانِ رُسل! وقت دعا ہے

اُمّت پہ تری آکے عجب وقت پڑا ہے

جو دین بڑی شان سے نکلا تھا وطن سے

پردیس میں وہ آج غریب الغریبا ہے"

O the cream of the crop of the Messengers! It is time for supplication

A surprisingly tragic time has come upon your Ummah

The Deen which had spread out from its home-town with grandeur and glory

Has today become, in foreign lands, the most estranged of the estranged

In this fashion the desire to visit the Haramayn Shareefayn was snowballing in my heart, and the intensity of yearning in my fantasies is manifest from this emotional writing from my teenage years. But there appeared to be no apparent means for this desire to be fulfilled in the near future. However, when

¹ Note that I used to write my diary during my boyhood years, not so much as for recording events, but to improve my writing skills. So it should not come as a surprise if the writing appears lacking in refinement and maturity.

our respected father returned from Hajj, he mentioned something which kindled new lamps of hope. He said that the owner of the Pan-Islamic Steam Ship Company had informed him that when their ships, after dropping off *Hajis* from Jeddah to Karachi, return to Jeddah from Karachi to pick up more *Hajis*, their ships go back almost empty. He offered that if anyone wanted to go for Umrah during this return journey of their ship, they could do so at a very nominal fare. (As far as I remember, the fare was only ninety rupees).

My happiness knew no bounds when our respected father (may Allah's mercy be upon him) narrated this offer in the house. It seemed that what I was dreaming about just a day ago could become reality soon. Thus me and my elder brother respected Muhammad Wali Raazi Sahab right away decided to take advantage of this opportunity. But I did not have a passport at the time, and in those days getting an international passport was an extremely uphill task. And one also had to get permission for overseas travel from the State Bank. In short, many challenges lay ahead. To get approval from the police headquarters, I spent days on end in its veranda from morning until evening. I would arrive in the veranda in the morning and begin beseeching the police officers and would spend the day enduring their indifference, and sometimes their rebuke as well. After spending many days in this manner, I finally got the NOC (No Objection Certificate) from them. Thereafter began the rounds to the passport office. At long last, after jumping through several hoops at various offices at McLeod Road (present-day Chundrigar Road) for a week, all challenges had been cleared with the favour and benevolence of Allah Ta'ala. And on 17 Muharram 1383H, equivalent to 10 June 1963, I boarded *Safeena-e-Hujjaj* together with my elder brother respected Muhammad Wali Raazi Sahab (may his shade be extended).

This ship had about ten decks and was equivalent to an entire city. Since it was returning to Jeddah to pick up passengers, there were hardly any passengers on board. We were provided a comfortable First Class cabin in which we two brothers and one more passenger were travelling. The captain of the ship, in respect of our respected father, treated us with much benevolence. Soon after we reached our cabin, another officer of the ship suddenly entered and asked: "Who is Muhammad Taqi Usmani?" When I replied, he said: "My name is Rasheed and I am the chief engineer of this ship. I was reading your book about birth control when I was informed that you are on board this very ship, so I came by to meet you." In this manner I developed acquaintance with both the main officers in charge of the ship, i.e. the captain and the chief engineer. And due to them, the entire crew of the ship became friends with us during the journey. They took us on a tour of the ship and showed us everything from the Bridge to the Engineering Room, and also revealed all the secrets of piloting the ship with us, and even let us hold the steering wheel for a while.

The truth of the matter is that the indescribable feeling of ever-escalating excitement one feels every moment of a journey by sea to the Haramayn Shareefayn, today that feeling cannot even be imagined during air travel. I penned brief reminiscences each day of that journey in my diary. Sadly when I opened that diary now, I found that ink has spread over many of its pages such that it is difficult to make out the writing. But some pages are still readable. The following was read in the diary of the day of departure (10 June 1963):

“Here I am, sitting in *Safeena-e-Hujjaj* and plunged in wonder at contemplating the limitless powers of my Creator through which, in just one week, He set the one who is more lowly than a particle of dust on route to the destination reaching which was unimaginable for him just a few days ago. Our ship is surging forward, tearing through tumultuous waves, and the sound of the waves thrashing against it is creating a dreamy melodic tune. The moon of the eighteenth night has just risen on the Eastern horizon, and it has rendered the rising waves aglow as if they were molten silver.”

The next day’s account is noted with these words:

“It is night time and our ship is rocking in the cradle of waves. Nothing is visible outside the ship except darkness. Darkness has blended the sky into the earth such that it is not only difficult to discern the sea from the sky, rather it is impossible. (The truth is that the manner in which the Noble Quran has mentioned sea waves during thick darkness, it is not possible to truly appreciate their depth without physically experiencing and observing the darkness at sea.) I am lying in my room, talking to the mixed fantasies with which my heart and mind had remained preoccupied the whole day... And my entire existence has become a lush garden with the thought that each passing minute is drawing me closer to that great and beloved land whose imaginations have made innumerable imprints on my mind since God knows when. Extreme love for each nook and cranny of that land, the craving to gaze upon it and the desire to prostrate, with one’s eyes, upon each and every crest and trough of that land have been infused into the very DNA of every Muslim.”

As mentioned before, *Safeena-e-Hujjaj* was such a gigantic ship that it looked like an entire city. On the other hand, we were undertaking this journey in June when the sea was at the peak of its powers. Thus when the humongous mountainous waves of the sea would rise, the ship would appear as if it were an insignificant piece of straw in comparison. The hall where we would have our breakfast overlooked the sea on both sides. It was a daily scene for us to gaze over the sea extending far into the horizon, and beyond the sea’s outer edge the sky would begin. Thereafter the ship would ride a wave and begin tilting towards the left, as a result of which the sea, extending till far, would begin dwindling and within moments the entire sea would disappear from the right and appear on the left side, and only the middle part of the sky would be visible on the right side. Then the sea would steadily disappear from the left side and a boundary of the sea, below the sky, would protrude on the right side, and the sea would re-emerge in a few moments.

On the fifth day of the journey our ship reached the shores of Aden. The port of Aden could not accommodate a ship this size, so it dropped anchor at a distance from the port. It was supposed to remain there for one day, while we got permission to go to the coast. Therefore we climbed down the ship using rope stairs and got on board a small boat which took us ashore. This area was called “Steamer Point” and there was a small population around it as well. However the main city, called “Crater”, was at quite a distance. We thus boarded a taxi and, passing through a neighbourhood or city (which was probably named “Ma’allaat”) on the way, we reached Crater. On our way, we also visited a Masjid named Masjid Abaan. There was a grave next to it, and the Masjid was named after the person residing in that grave. At the time we thought this was perhaps the name of a Sahabi. Later, in a writing of our respected father (may Allah’s mercy be upon him) which he had penned regarding his journey for

Umrah in 1382H (and InshaAllah will be published in the collection of his travelogues), it was learnt that this grave belonged to Hazrat Hakam Bin Abaan Bin Uthman, who was a pious personality of the second century Hijri, and from whom Hazrat Imam Ahmad Bin Hanbal (may Allah's mercy be upon him) has narrated Ahadith.¹ The Imam of the Masjid, Shaikh Mutahhar Al-Ghurbani who was a scholar and a prolific author, also told our respected father that this Masjid was built during the lifetime of the Noble Messenger (peace be upon him), and that when Hazrat Ali (may Allah honour his face) came to Yemen, he prayed in this Masjid two times.

Anyway, after sightseeing in Yemen our ship set sail again towards its destination. The following is written in my diary of the next day:

"The nearer we are approaching Jeddah, the faster is my heart beating. We are just 180 miles away from Jeddah, and InshaAllah will reach that destination by 12 tomorrow just imagining which transforms the mind into a fragrant garden. Today the ship has changed its course towards north-west. Towards the west is the continent of Africa, and the breathtaking mountains of Yemen and Saudi Arabia lure the eyes on the east. Just today we went for a detailed tour of the Control Room and Engine."

And the next day's (17th June) diary has these words:

"Today our ship-to-the-desired-land reached that coast which guides to a life-giving valley of peace and tranquility. Already at half-past-twelve we could make out the misty mountains of the Arabian Peninsula towards the right. My heartbeat has been fluttering every moment since morning, until the skyline of Jeddah loomed into view on the horizon and each minute became excruciatingly difficult to pass. However, Allah had planned one more test of patience. The ship anchored at some distance from the port and remained standing for almost forty-five minutes, and finally began moving after a long wait. According to the time on the ship, we had alighted at Jeddah Port at about two o'clock. We put our luggage at the place of an acquaintance of our respected father's (may Allah's mercy be upon him), respected Ashraf Saroji Sahab... Now the heart desired to reach Makkah Mukarramah as soon as possible, but considering a night's stay here necessary I put off my heart's desire till tomorrow."

In fact we had to undergo some necessary legal processes before departing for Makkah Mukarramah, which could only take place the next morning. May Allah Ta'ala recompense the best rewards to Ashraf Saroji Sahab. He was among those who considered our respected father (may Allah's mercy be upon him) their spiritual leader. He had opened the doors of his house for those visiting for Hajj or Umrah. He even came to the port to receive us and we spent the night at his house. When we went for prayer to the Masjid of the neighbourhood, during *Sajdah* (prostration) the heart was brimming with exhilaration and gratitude, with the thought the *Ka'ba* towards which we have been prostrating until now is just 54 kilometers away.

¹ However this lowly one could not find, after a cursory search, Hakam Bin Abaan Bin Uthman among the teachers of Imam Ahmad Bin Hanbal (may Allah's mercy be upon him), and neither could I find the name Hakam among any sons of Abaan (the son of Hazrat Uthman). It is possible that he was the grandson of some other elder named Uthman, other than Ameerul Mumineen Hazrat Uthman.

We passed through a roofed bazaar on our way back from prayer. I saw makeshift stalls with merchants selling olives in big plates, their oil scattered on the plates. I had never seen olives before, nor had I had the opportunity to taste them until then. They appeared to me like small *gulab jamuns* drenched in syrup. With this in mind, I eagerly put one in my mouth thinking that it would be some sweet fruit. But after putting it in my mouth, completely contrary to my expectations when its briny and bitterish taste reached my tongue and palate, it became difficult to even chew and swallow it. I was bewildered. Is this what the olive I had heard praised so much really tastes like? But what followed next is that during that very stay in Hejaz I began tasting it occasionally due to peer pressure. Gradually I became habituated to its taste, and the same briny and bitterish taste became delectable to my tongue and palate. And today it is among my favourite foods. The lesson learned was that when one begins acting upon certain commandments of Shariah, they also feel bitter at the beginning. But if one musters up courage and determination and habituates oneself to them, they eventually become so beloved that one feels restless without them.

Anyway! I remember about that night that the humid heat was so severe that the sweat would not dry up despite sitting in front of the fan. In spite of enjoying the hospitality of Ashraf Saroji Sahab, the heart wanted the night to melt away in moments and for us to somehow reach Makkah Mukarramah. The night passed agonizingly slowly, and the next morning by around eight we reached the taxi stand, where taxis charged the fare per passenger. We took a cab which soon left Jeddah and got onto the road leading to Makkah Mukarramah. The present-day highway had not been built by then, and the road was narrow but smooth. Shortly, mountains loomed into the view on the right and left, and tear-filled eyes could gaze upon those mountains and tracks which at some time would have kissed the feet of the leader of the two worlds (peace be upon him) and his gallantly devoted *Sahaba* (companions). We were silently flashing back to the past while gazing upon the rocky deserts when “Shumaisi” arrived. Our respected father had told us that this is the new name of “Hudaibiyyah”. Nowadays the highway from Jeddah to Makkah Mukarramah passes at a distance from this place, but in those days the road passed right through “Hudaibiyyah” itself. Thus when we reached here, images from the Noble Messenger’s (peace be upon him) journey of Hudaibiyyah flashed through my mind one after the other. The arrival of the leader of the two worlds (peace be upon him) for Umrah, his she-camel’s refusal to move further from here, sending Hazrat Uthman (may Allah be pleased with him) to Makkah Mukarramah for dialog with the Quraysh, rumours about his martyrdom, the leader of the two worlds’ (peace be upon him) taking *Baiyah* from the Sahaba that in case war became necessary they would all gallantly lay their lives on the line, thereafter the arrival of delegations of Quraish, and negotiations of a peace agreement, preparation of the treaty with lenient conditions, the coming of Hazrat Abu Jundal (may Allah be pleased with him), and his being returned in compliance with the conditions of the treaty, the passion and fervor of the Sahaba, and finally the Noble Quran declaring the treaty a “*Fath Mubeen*” (clear victory). The sacred land at which all these events took place was right before our eyes. The boundaries of the Haram were beginning at a short distance from here, with two pillars erected on either side of the road to demarcate it. A Masjid was built right under the shade of these pillars, about which it is popularly believed that during his stay at Hudaibiyyah, the noble leader of the two worlds (peace be upon him) would come to this place to pray so that the prayers could be performed within the precincts of the *Haram*. And this belief is also supported by narrations from *Seerah* (Prophetic biography).